

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

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LIMDIS

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TAGS: PINS, CT

SUBJECT: THE EAGLE IN THE SUN CENTRAL AFRICA'S NAPOLEAN EMERGES

REF: A. BANGUI 1713 B. BANGUI 2329

1. SUMMARY: THE REVOLUTION HAS AT LAST FOUND ITS NAPOLEON. TWO DAYS AFTER THE ANNIVERSARY OF NAPOLEON'S OWN CORONATION, BOKASSA SUCCEEDED IN ACHIEVING HIS LONG-HELD DREAM, HIS ULTIMATE APOTHEOSIS, HIS PROCLAMATION AS EMPEROR. AFRICA AGAIN HAS AN INDIGENOUS EMPIRE; BUT HOW LONG CAN IT LAST? OTHER EMBASSY MESSAGES HAVE REPORTED AND ANALYZED THE NEW CONSTITUTION; THIS MESSAGE IS AN ATTEMPT TO SUGGEST SOME OF THE LONGER TERM IMPLICATIONS OF BOKASSA'S NEW FOUND GLORY. END SUMMARY.

2. WHAT WAS PARTICULARLY STRIKING TO THE DIPLOMATIC SPECTATORS AT THE OMNISPORT STADIUM WHERE THE PROCLAMATION OF THE EMPIRE TOOK PLACE ON DECEMBER 4 WAS THE UNREALITY OF THE SITUATION AND THE LACK OF SPONTANEITY IN THE PUBLIC'S RESPONSE. ALTHOUGH THE PARTY FAITHFUL HAD BEEN MARSHALLED AND THE USUAL POLITICAL SONGS AND DANCES PERFORMED, WITH CAREFULLY ORGANIZED SHOUTS OF LONG LIVE BOKASSA, ETC.,

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BOKASSA'S APPEARANCE GENERATED LITTLE ENTHUSIASM. ONLY WHEN HE

JOINED HANDS WITH PRESIDENT MOBUTU DID REALLY FERVENT CHEERS BREAK OUT. EVEN THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE EMPIRE RECEIVED ONLY MILD APPLAUSE, LESS THAN THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. CURIOUSLY, BOKASSA MADE NO ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT THE OCCASION FOR HIS OWN BENEFIT, BOWING SOLEMNLY IN RESPONSE TO APPLAUSE, BUT AVOIDING ANY ACCEPTANCE SPEECH OR EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE FOR THE HONOR BEING CONFERRED ON HIM.

3. AMONG THOSE CENTRAL AFRICANS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY HAD CONTACT, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE CYNICISM ABOUT THE CHANGES AND RESENTMENT THAT BOKASSA HAS MADE THE COUNTRY AN INTERNATIONAL LAUGHING STOCK. THIS CYNICISM IS USUALLY ACCCOMPANIED BY CONTEMPTUOUS DERISION OF THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE DISENCHANTMENT WITH BOKASSA AND HIS STYLE DESCRIBED REF (A) HAS INCREASED. WHEN THE PARAPHERNALIA OF EMPIRE IS ELABORATED AND THE CORONATION TAKES PLACE, BOKASSA'S POSTURINGS WILL BE FURTHER CRITICIZED AND HIS DOMESTIC CREDIBILITY FURTHER WEAKENED.

4. BOKASSA, HOWEVER, REMAINS A SHREWD AND TENACIOUS POLITICIAN. THE ARREST OF VARIOUS MILITARY OFFICERS (NOW SAID TO NUMBER OVER 20) AND A FORMER AGRICULTURE MINISTER ONLY DAYS BEFORE THE PROCLAMATION OF

THE EMPIRE MAY WELL HAVE BEEN DESIGNED AS A WARNING TO THOSE WHO OPPOSED BOKASSA'S PLANS. WHETHER OR NOT A COUP WAS ACTUALLY PLANNED, BOKASSA CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED THAT HE HAS THE UPPER HAND AND INTENDS TO MAINTAIN IT. THERE IS STILL NO ORGANIZED OPPOSITION AND NO FORUM IN WHICH ONE CAN DEVELOP, GIVEN THE NETWORK OF INFORMERS BOKASSA HAS BUILT UP OVER THE YEARS. NONETHELESS, THE HUBRIS IMPLICIT IN THE EAGLE IN THE SUN AS HIS PERSONAL INSIGNIA IS NOT LOST ON THOUGHTFUL CENTRAL AFRICANS.

5. THE ONE POSITIVE ELEMENT IN THE NEW POLITICAL EQUATION IS THE CONSTITUTION. IF THE CONSTITUTION IS IMPLEMENTED IT WOULD MARK A SIGNIFICANT LIBERALIZATION OF THE REGIME AND A MAJOR STEP IN THE LEGITIMIZATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF BOKASSA'S RULE. CERTAINLY, THE CAREFULLY OUTLINED HUMAN RIGHTS PROVISIONS WILL BE OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE. THEIR EXPLICIT ENUMERATION MAY WELL ACT AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PERHAPS EVEN A LEGAL CHECK ON FUTURE EXCESSES. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS ATTENDANT INSTITUTIONS ALSO GIVE BOKASSA A CHANCE, IF HE WISHES TO TAKE IT, TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE

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ARBITRARY AND CAPRICIOUS ONE-MAN RULE OF THE PAST. MOST OBSERVERS ARE SKEPTICAL THAT THE CONSTITUTION WILL BE IMPLEMENTED AND ONLY EXPERIENCE WILL SHOW IF THEY ARE RIGHT. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT BOKASSA REMAINS THE PRESIDENT FOR LIFE OF MESAN SUGGESTS THAT HE INTENDS TO MAINTAIN DOSE CONTROL OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

6. BOKASSA IS NOW MORE ISOLATED THAN EVER BEFOR. HE HAS SPURNED THE

ADVICE OF HIS POLITICAL ADVISORS AND THOSE AFRICAN HEADS OF STATE,
SUCH AS HOUPHOUET AND MOBUTU, WITH WHOM HE HAS THE CLOSEST IDEOLOGICAL

AND PERSONAL LINKS. HE HAS ALSO DEFIED THE HESITATIONS OF HIS OWN
POLITICAL PARTY, WHICH FOR ALMOST A MONTH DRAGGED THEIR FEET ON
THE PROPOSED EMPIRE. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT HIS NEW-FOUND FRIENDS, THE
LIBYANS AND THE CHINESE, WILL BE ENCHANTED WITH THE NEW POLITICAL
ORDER. MORE AND MORE HE WILL HAVE TO RELY ON POLITICAL MANIPULATION
TO MAINTAIN HIS POSITION AND ON THE FRENCH
FOR EXTERNAL SUPPORT. HE IS, HOWEVER, A MASTER OF THE ART AND FOR
THE TIME BEING WE SHOULD NOT ASSUME THAT HIS POSITION IS DIRECTLY
THREATENED. INDEED, THERE MAY BE A CERTAIN PREDISPOSITION IN THE
COUNTRY TO WAIT TO SEE HOW THE NEW CONSTITUTION ACTUALLY WORKS.
THE IMPERIAL SUPERSTRUCTURE MAY BE BUILT ON SAND, BUT FOR THE
MOMENT BOKASSA IS FIRMLY IN CONTROL AND IS BASKING IN THE
EXTRAVAGANCES OF HIS OWN FANCY.

6. JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN, WRITING OVER SEVENTY YEARS AGO CLAIMED:
"THE DAY OF SMALL NATIONS HAS LONG PASSED AWAY. THE DAY OF EMPIRES
HAS COME." HE WOULD SURELY HAVE BEEN AMAZED BY THE FIRST AFRICAN
PROOF OF HIS DICTUM. BUT IN THE SWEEP OF AFRICAN HISTORY THIS
PARTICULAR AGE OF EMPIRE IS NOT LIKELY TO SURVIVE ITS CURRENT
INCARNATION. ONLY TIME WILL TELL HOW LONG THAT WILL BE. QUAINTON

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